

Senator Craig Pridemore

WASHINGTON STATE SENATE

49th LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

SUMMER 2005

Dear Neighbors,

The 2005 legislation session recently wrapped up, and it yielded valuable results for residents of the 49th Legislative District and the state as a whole. Faced with one of the biggest budget deficits in memory, we still were able to invest in expanding higher education, improving our mental health system and fixing our statewide transportation system.

The Legislature took a first step in addressing the lack of higher education options in southwest Washington. Washington State University-Vancouver and Clark College are valuable resources in our community, but as the fastest growing part of the state, we need more enrollment slots. The budget we approved this year makes a down payment, but we still need a long-term plan for higher education in southwest Washington.

This was a banner year for protecting Washington's uniquely beautiful environment. We passed measures that will clean up our air and water, including a landmark bill that tightens up our auto emissions standards.

Unfortunately, we did not pass a sustainable budget that solves the structural deficit in our state: We don't take in enough revenue to support the programs and services our state must provide to keep our citizens healthy and our economy strong. The Legislature will continue to be faced with the same tough decisions about cuts and taxes until we find a way to fix the system.

You'll find more session details inside this newsletter. I appreciate all the calls and e-mails during session, and encourage you to keep in touch with my office. It is important to me to hear your opinions and ideas.

Sincerely,



Craig Pridemore
State Senator, 49th Legislative District



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Higher education options in our corner of the state are about to expand greatly. The population boom in southwest Washington has left us desperately needing a four-year school — we are the most underserved region of the state when it comes to higher education.

I worked successfully to pass a bill that allows Washington State University-Vancouver to enroll freshmen beginning in fall 2006.

I'm dedicated to making WSU-Vancouver the four-year university our corner of the state deserves.

House Bill 1794 also permits other branch campuses around the state to expand, and establishes a pilot program for Washington's community and technical colleges to offer select four-year degrees in high-demand fields.

While this is progress, it in no way solves the enrollment crunch our state continues to face. We will need to find thousands more enrollment slots to keep up with current demand, and we need a sustainable budget plan to fund these additional enrollments.

We made many other gains for our education system this session. I was honored this session to serve as vice chair for higher education on the Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education Committee. We had a lot on our plate this year, including the passage of a measure that calls for a comprehensive review of the structure and funding for Washington's early learning, K-12 and higher education systems.

Education

The 2005-2007 operating budget includes \$1.7 million for this study, which will help us determine whether we are spending our public education dollars efficiently.

I'm also pleased that we dedicated more resources to help struggling students. We boosted special education funding by more than



\$10 million, and set up a pilot program to train teachers in teaching students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities. Further, Senate Democrats fought successfully to retain the Readiness to Learn program in the budget. Both the House of Representatives and the governor proposed eliminating this important program, which helps prepare young children for school.

Further, we created the Education Legacy Trust Fund, which pays for two citizens initiatives that lower class size and give

school employees much-deserved cost-of-living adjustments. Initiatives 728 and 732 had been suspended in previous budgets.

Students learn best when they are in safe, well-equipped facilities. This year, the capital budget includes a record \$600 million for K-12 school construction, which is particularly important for areas with rapid population growth. This is a major new investment in school buildings: The last budget included about \$400 million for this purpose. In addition, the budget includes \$4.5 million for the second phase of a school mapping and safety project, which helps provide reliable campus maps for safety officials in the event of an emergency.

Unfortunately, we did not make meaningful progress on reforming the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). Next year, more than 60 percent of students around the state are expected to fail this test, creating a substantial barrier to earning a high school diploma. While the WASL is a useful tool for encouraging our public schools to maintain high standards, I continue to believe it should not be used as a graduation requirement for students as it will begin with the class of 2008. As the real impact of this test on the lives of our kids becomes clear, I hope the Legislature will take decisive action to ensure that all of our children leave our public school system with an equal opportunity to succeed.

PUD Repair Service Will Continue

Among my top priorities this session was ensuring that Clark Public Utilities was able to continue its appliance repair service. This service, which provides low-cost repair to heating and cooling systems, has been available to Clark County residents for

nearly 70 years, but some local business owners sued to close it down because they didn't like the competition it posed.

My legislation (Senate Bill 5348) was successful in protecting the service from closure. Local governments

need to be able to make decisions that work for their communities, and I was happy to sponsor a bill that maintains that right for Clark County.



Transportation

This year, legislators approved the Transportation Partnerships Fund, which helps pay for more than 200 projects around the state to improve our roads, bridges and intersections.

The fund includes \$50 million for the Columbia River crossing and Interstate 5 improvements in Clark County, as well as money to study traffic congestion in our region. It also invests in improvements along Interstate 205 near Mill Plain.

I'm also pleased that this transportation package invests in mass

transit and environmentally friendly transportation options. Giving commuters more alternatives will go a long way toward cleaning up our air and cutting down on traffic. We focused on commute trip reduction tax credits, which encourage employers to create programs that reduce drive-alone commuting. And we made significant investments in regional and commuter bus service, passenger rail, and park and ride lots.



Environment

Legislators passed groundbreaking legislation this session that will go a long way toward cleaning up our air and water. First, House Bill 1397 makes our state one of nine to adopt strict car emissions standards. With more than half of air pollution coming from cars, it was time to move to clean car standards. This measure will require the cars sold and registered in Washington to meet low-emissions standards, depending on Oregon adopting the same standards.

Senate Bill 5509 will bring more so-called "green buildings" to our state. It requires construction of new state buildings to emphasize natural light, healthy building materials, and energy and water conservation.

We also voted to establish an independent Oil Spill Advisory Council, which will monitor oil spill procedures and help ensure a rapid response in case a spill does occur in one of our waterways.

Mental Health

Offering proper mental health services is critically important. Without proper treatment, the mentally ill often end up in emergency rooms, in jail or on the streets. Not only does this cost taxpayers big money, it makes our communities less safe.

The federal government recently made changes in the mental health funding formula that resulted in an \$80 million loss for our state. A series of stories in the *Columbian* highlighted just how dire the situation is in Clark County: Due to those changes in federal Medicaid rules, 1,500 of our county's low-income mentally ill residents lost services, and other cuts were not far behind.

The Legislature remedied the problem by backfilling the \$80 million gap left in federal Medicaid funding. This will help ensure those who

most need mental health treatment get proper services without delay.

We also approved a landmark piece of legislation that will make substantial changes to the treatment of the mentally ill and chemically dependent. Senate Bill 5763 helps get the proper treatment to individuals suffering from these often co-occurring disorders in a timely manner.

Among its provisions, SB 5763 expands services for Medicaid-eligible people and implements pilot programs: one for secure detoxification facilities and another for intensive management for those people who are frequent users of emergency, crisis and correctional facilities.

By treating these disorders in a proactive and effective way, we will cut crime and save taxpayers in the coming years in criminal justice, child welfare and public assistance costs.

Other legislative victories

I am pleased that several other measures I sponsored gained approval this session, including:

✓ Document recording fee for historic preservation (House Bill 1386). This session, the Legislature raised counties' document recording fees. It was important to me that some of this new revenue be dedicated to improving local communities. I successfully sponsored an amendment that earmarks \$1 of the fee for local programs. In our area, these dollars could go toward historic preservation projects, such as the Clark County Historical Museum, the Vancouver National Historic Reserve, and the Confluence Project, which marks the Lewis and Clark bicentennial through artwork around the Columbia River Basin.

✓ National Guard call-up rules (Senate Bill 5606). This bill allows the governor to call up the National Guard to prepare for an impending crisis. Currently, the Guard cannot be called up until an emergency is declared. This will allow for preparations during what could be a tough wildfire season this summer.

✓ Historical property leasehold excise tax exemption (Senate Bill 5154). This bill allows Vancouver to eliminate its public development authority yet continue to exempt the Vancouver National Historic Reserve from leasehold excise taxes. (Such taxes are generally levied for the privilege of using or occupying public land.)

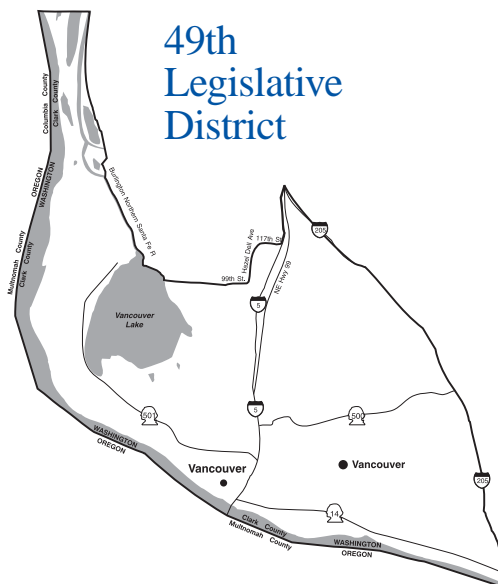
✓ Clark County comprehensive plan. I was able to help defeat efforts to undermine Clark County's growth management act. While I continue to believe that land use decisions should be made at the local level, those decisions can have statewide impacts when they are made irresponsibly, causing overcrowded schools, congested freeways and a declining business environment. I intend to ensure that the state continues to require responsible planning by our county commissioners.

Equal rights for every Washington citizen

Every year for the past three decades, members of the Legislature have tried to pass a measure that would ban discrimination based on sexual orientation when it comes to employment, banking and housing. Although Senate Democrats managed to bring House Bill 1515 to the floor for an historic vote, we simply couldn't muster the votes for it to

pass. It failed by a single vote.

This was a big disappointment for every Washington resident who believes gays and lesbians deserve the same protections as other citizens. Our state should not sanction discrimination. While we didn't get the measure through this year, I believe its time will come. I will continue working for equal rights for all people.



Thanks to all of you who joined me and Reps. Fromhold and Moeller for a town hall meeting May 14.

We appreciated hearing your opinions and questions, and sharing with you information about the 2005 legislative session. I will keep you informed about future town hall meetings.

Thanks to our 2005 legislative pages from the 49th District for all of their hard work!



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